

PROLOGUE

*There are five mics in a line on the stage. As the audience enter, **QUEENIE, DEVIKA, MACK, THEO** and **DARCY** are in their own bedrooms. The bedrooms are on different levels on stage. They're practicing their poetry individually. Once the audience settles, the poets form a circle downstage. They hold hands and bow their heads in prayer. Beat. They each step to a mic. They look out to the audience and take a deep breath in. Beat.*

[I'M GOING TO START THE POEM]

QUEENIE: There's always a pause

DEVIKA: between the inhale and the first word.

MACK: The room is silent.

THEO: Butterflies collide,

DARCY: The words begin to rise inside of you

QUEENIE: Metaphors and similes contort like question
marks

DEVIKA: You mouth unhinges

ALL: You speak,

Beat.

MACK: Whilst slowly pulling your chest open.

THEO: You didn't write to have the answers.

DARCY: You were trying to find your way with a broken
compass for a heart.

QUEENIE: Trying to survive a tsunami of awkward moments.

DEVIKA: Trying to keep steady when the ground kept shifting beneath you.

MACK: Hoping, that being born in God's own country,

THEO: Meant blessings and prayers were answered.

DARCY: But with each line that was written, the definition of the poem began to mutate

QUEENIE: As if being itself, like being the writer, is something it never wanted to inhabit.

DEVIKA: My body is a country I fled a long time ago /

MACK: I'm sorry (*Beat*) I've said too much.

THEO: Bent open like a book spine.

DARCY: Exposed an untold story.

ALL: Excuse this stream of consciousness

There is so much

The page can't catch it all

I'm going to start the poem now

Beat.

DEVIKA: I want to be someone.

ALL: But I'm afraid to be someone.

THEO: 17

MACK: 14

DEVIKA: 16

DARCY: 15

QUEENIE: 18, standing on the precipice of my own
greatness. Billie Holiday /

DARCY: Feeling like strange fruit. Singing the blues for
the black girls in Chapeltown that aint no muse/

THEO: And for the black boys, thought to be feared but
taught to be inferior.

MACK: Complex, this life of haves and have

MACK/DEVIKA: knots /

DEVIKA: Tied around my voice box. Your expectations
of submission, of oppression, always misrepresent me /

DEVIKA/QUEENIE/DARCY: That's if I'm represented
at all. /

QUEENIE: I'm sorry (*Beat*). I've done it again.

DARCY: I am a cracked dam.

THEO: A flash flood of emotions.

ALL: Excuse this stream of consciousness

There is so much

the page can't catch it all

I'm going to start the poem now.

Beat.

MACK: Leeds, this city,

THEO: Of mixed ancestry and uncertainty.

MACK: Of boarded up shops and heirloom council flats.

DARCY: Of nostalgia and old photos curved in at the corners.

QUEENIE: Of migrant parents and bilingual tongues.

DEVIKA: Of late night DMs and first love heartbreaks.

MACK: Of underground hip hop and Bible readings on Wednesdays.

THEO: Of beauty and roughness in the same postcode.

DARCY: of dreams passing like comets /

QUEENIE: Wait/

ALL: *(to QUEENIE)* What?

QUEENIE: Am I the comet or the dream?

DEVIKA: Prophet or follower?

MACK: Original or copy?

DARCY: Poet or audience?

Beat.

THEO: It's happened again hasn't it? Sorry

QUEENIE: Sometimes I feel like a riddle

DEVIKA: Without a solution.

ALL: Excuse this stream of consciousness

There is so much

the page can't catch it all

I'm going to start the poem now.

I'm going to start.

Beat.

ACT ONE, SCENE ONE

July 2017, Brave New Voices International Youth Poetry Festival, New York City.

They directly address the audience.

THEO: Hi, I'm Theo.

QUEENIE: First of all, we are,

ALL: (*except DARCY*) Metaphonetics /

MACK: and if you didn't catch it, we are from Leeds. L,
double E, D, S /

ALL : (*except Darcy*) What! What!

MACK: I'm Mack, by the way, a.k.a (*sings Mark Morrison - Return Of The Mack*) Return of the Mack oh my god/

QUEENIE: Please stop. /

THEO: Can I finish?/ (*MACK gestures for THEO to continue.*)

QUEENIE: Can I just add, we've been through a lot together /

THEO: I know you came here to hear to watch the poetry slam but/

DEVIKA: We just needed a minute (*looks around the space and the audience*) and take all of this in /

QUEENIE: Sometimes you have to stop and give thanks.

MACK: It's been a mad road getting here.

DEVIKA: And to think, three months ago, these friends felt like strangers to me.

QUEENIE: Standing here, we're not just representing Metaphonetics.

MACK: We're reppin' our city.

THEO: The home that's loved us and taught us some hard lessons.

QUEENIE: I don't think either one of us joined to Metaphonetics, knowing that we'd laugh so much/

DEVIKA: Cry so much/

MACK: Think so much/

THEO: And do so much.

MACK: It was just poetry innit.

QUEENIE: Five years ago, I wanted to spit some bars and show these boys that Queen Latifah was right, ladies first.

THEO: *(to QUEENIE)* And I was intimidated from day one.

QUEENIE: *(to THEO)* You didn't even want to be there.

THEO: *(to the audience)* My mum made me join.

QUEENIE: I'd snatch whispers from your lips.

THEO: You knew who you were/

QUEENIE: The descendant of Yoruba kings and queens. Odudua, black goddess of the earth created this land, not your patriarchal religion and white Jesus, *abeg!* /

THEO: *(looking at Queenie)* Hand out, hips cocked, lips pressed, knowledge deep /

QUEENIE: I had a lot to say and she saw it. *(Beat)* Yemisi, found me doing open mics. She invited me to join the tribe of orators known as Metaphonetics.

THEO: She found us all. She is Mother Orator, the poet whisperer /

QUEENIE: Third eye seeing/

THEO: Light giving/

QUEENIE: Headwrap wearing goddess/

DEVIKA: Who put mics in our hands. Told us we had wings but didn't know how to fly yet. So, every Tuesday, 6-8pm at Mandela Center, we were going to learn.

THEO: Since 2003 she's been waking young minds.

QUEENIE: Over the years I started volunteering.

THEO: We'd even go into schools.

DEVIKA: And that's where they met me.

THEO: The Foyle Young Poet of the Year.

QUEENIE: You know how you have the displays, showing the school's achievements. Well, (*referring to DEVIKA*) this one over here, had a whole board to herself/

THEO: showing teeth at the Southbank Center next to Grace Nichols. /

MACK: Things really didn't take off until I joined. I mean, (*points to DEVIKA*) Southbank, (*points to himself*) streets of Seacoft, (*beat*) No comparison.

QUEENIE: We did pick him up on the streets. He'd been excluded./

MACK: I was seeking other means of education /

QUEENIE: Riding bikes and going to the chippy /

MACK: (*gasps*) Don't make fun of Desmond. He's a very intelligent man who pulls off a fishnet beautifully.

QUEENIE: Yemisi walked in with him six months ago and the first words were/

MACK: Yo wagwan fam! /

QUEENIE: My ancestors told me to have mercy on you/

MACK: And since, we've been the United Kingdom of Naija.

MACK sings the opening Zulu chant in the Circle of Life whilst raising his arms up. Beat.

QUEENIE: That's fucking Zulu.

Beat. THEO turns to DARCY.

THEO: And then, there was Darcy.

Beat. They all look to DARCY.

DEVIKA: She snuck into our lives exactly four months ago.

THEO: Sat quietly for weeks/

DEVIKA: Until round two./

THEO: Seven Arts Center/

QUEENIE: Metaphonetics, Annual Youth Poetry Slam/

DEVIKA: The competition that decided who gets to stand right here. /

MACK: It was neck and neck/

QUEENIE: We all wanted to be on the team/

THEO: Eighteen poets competing, five available places /

DEVIKA: But only one could be crowned 2017 Slam
Champion./

QUEENIE, MACK, DEVIKA and THEO move their mics aside, leaving DARCY alone on stage.

MACK: Mic check/

DEVIKA: Next poet on deck is/

A spotlight shines on DARCY. Beat.